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Mme. Paderewska's Story of Poland's Great Adventure

From Piano Stool to the Premiership of a Reborn Nation

By George Palmer Putnam

PADEREWSKI.

There probably is not a single name more familiar to Americans at large than that. Certainly no one else associated with the fine arts is nearly so well known to the rank and file as this extraordinary Pole who stepped from an American piano stool to the premiership of Europe's largest new republic.

In 1914 Ignace Jan Paderewski was acclaimed the world's greatest pianist and was said to be the wealthiest of all musicians. After serving his fatherland throughout the war as a sort of patriot-at-large, he became Premier of Poland just a year ago. And now comes the news that he has resigned and, presumably, will again devote himself to music.

On November 12 Paderewski made a speech to the Diet which actually marked the end of his ministry. The day following that "farewell appearance" I lunched with the Premier and his wife at Zamek, the royal palace at Warsaw, home of Poland's kings of old and occupied in turn by Russian and German governors of the prisoner land.

Paderewski then was in the midst of a bitter political fight and it was current belief about the capital that the fall of his ministry was inevitable, although few expected it to come so promptly. The Polish Diet, which is about 80 per cent of peasant extraction, has from the outset lacked a clear-cut majority party, the ministry having been sustained by shifting amalgamations of various groups. The final crash came when the Peasant party, comprising actually only a portion of the peasant members, threw its votes to the left and brought about a vote which was practically one of "no confidence."

"He has fulfilled his mission."

In a nutshell, that was the view of the Premier's opponents as voiced in Warsaw.

Call Work Finished

A critic might amplify this statement by saying that while Paderewski's services had been invaluable to Poland in winning recognition among the other nations, he alone among Poles having a world-wide name, the time of such usefulness had ended; he was not equipped, temperamentally or from experience, to conduct the business of internal organization and administration.

Whether or not such criticism was justified, it resulted in the Premier's resignation. And whether or not any one else could have done better, or half as well, is, of course, unanswerable.

The important point for America to realize is that the change in no-wise involves a crisis in Poland's affairs, though doubtless it will offer ammunition for her critics. There is widespread propaganda everywhere designed to stir up trouble for the new republic. A weak Poland, for instance, is a consummation devoutedly wished by Germany. Also, Poland now has an army of some six hundred thousand soldiers in the field against the Bolshevist forces of "Red" Russia,' whose agents naturally slip all the monkey wrenches they can into the machinery of Polish progress.

But Josef Pilsudski, the outstanding strong man of Central Europe, remains as chief of state, with the overwhelming majority of the country solidly behind him. Changes in government personnel are perhaps unfortunate, but they need have no fundamental effect. Only one who has visited Poland as a disinterested observer, and really sensed what has been accomplished in the one short year of her national existence, realizes that she is really out of the woods. Out of the worst of them, anyway.

Resurrecting a nation of twenty-five million persons which has been held in bondage for 147 years is no simple single-year task, of course, and naturally much remains to be done. But the foundations seem to be solid.

The big test now is whether the popular morale can stand the strain of Bolshevist temptation and propaganda, of which there is a vast amount, tangible and intangible. This winter successfully weathered—and I firmly believe it will be—Poland will be able to hold her place comfortably in the procession of nations.

Paderewski, when I saw him in Warsaw during November, was a weary man. The famous mop of fluffy hair had grayed and thinned and receded from the broad temples. But the fire was still there, despite all that he had gone through.

"If it wasn't for Mme. Paderewska there wouldn't be any Paderewski," an intimate friend of theirs told me.

By which he meant that, besides being a wife to the Premier, Helena Paderewska was his guard and nearly his nurse. Knowing something of all that, I once asked what she considered her biggest job.

Her Big Job

"Taking care of my husband," came the unhesitating reply.

There is an old Polish proverb which declares that man is the head of the family, but woman is the neck which turns his head. Paderewski, I am sure, has a head of his own which is seldom turned, in any sense of the phrase, by any one, but even so, it was evident at Warsaw that Helena Paderewska had a mighty potent voice in affairs of state and near-state. Which was why it seemed to me this "First Lady of Poland," who had lived so long in America, was almost as interesting as her unusual husband.

"As a very little girl I remember praying in a church here in Warsaw that my life might be exciting. Above all I dreaded dullness," Mme. Paderewska once told me.

"Your prayer seems to have been answered," I suggested. "Surely, you're getting enough excitement?"

"Too much!" she smiled.

Too much, indeed! Not long ago, for instance, six bullets crashed into the mirror where Paderewski was arranging his tie in a hotel in Posnan, in what used to be German Poland, with his wife sitting near by. Another time their railroad carriage was lifted from the tracks by an exploding bomb, fortunately bouncing back upon the rails.

"I seldom worry," the Premier's wife told me, speaking of these things. "Perhaps that is because I am so Americanized." Then her dark eyes became serious. "You see, I am sure no harm will come to my husband. God has given him a task, and he will be spared until it is completed. All is foreordained—of that I am quite positive."

Through the window we saw the soldiers in the courtyard. In the streets beyond were more soldiers, stocky youngsters with rifles ready. And far and away beyond the city were other armies along the far-flung Bolshevik front and the undefined frontiers of the new republic, stubbornly prepared for the struggle which all thinking Poland considers inevitable—a life-and-death grapple with unbeaten Germany.

"Aren't you nervous some times?" I asked.

"No. Perhaps that, too, is because I am so Americanized."

"America is complimented," I smiled.

"Never nervous," she continued, "but some times homesick."

Second to no other spot on earth, I knew my hostess and her husband love their California farm at Paso Robles.

"We will return there some day, God willing," says Mme. Paderewska. She declares her ambition is to raise chickens again, as she did in Switzerland before the war, where her prize birds won all the awards.

In America they have lived and worked the greater part of the time since their marriage in 1899, the virtuoso's first visit occurring in 1891. In the following year, by the way, he set a new financial high-water record in the musical world, receiving $180,000 for sixty-seven recitals in twenty-six cities. And his salary as Premier was a sum equal to about $50 a month!

Homesick for America

Paderewski has voiced frequently his admiration for America and his gratitude for what America has done for him. His respect—perhaps envy—for our political institutions was expressed long ago, following his first American triumphs. In the light of what the past year has brought Poland, that after-dinner speech before the Lotus Club back in '93 is rather prophetic.

"I loved your country," he said, "before I knew it, for the very simple reason, allow me to tell you, that this country is the only one in which thousands of Poles are living freely and enjoying liberty; the country in which every countryman of mine may speak whatever he likes of the past and future of his own land without fearing to be arrested."

There was a pleasant, almost-American stamp about the Paderewskis and their entourage. For instance, her husband's aid and confidential helper, Major Ivanowski, who has made his mark in America for fifteen years as an artist and illustrator, and who, by the way, is reputed to have been court painter at Petrograd when he was only twenty-one years old. The major and his wife, who is an American, lived at the Palace. And then as further back-home landmarks the visitor to Mme. Paderewska's private reception room finds the only two photographs there are of familiar faces: President Wilson, inscribed to "Poland's greatest son," and a very debonair portrait (from a painting) of Colonel House, presented to "My good friend, Mme. Paderewska."

From the personal side, Mme. Paderewska's most important function was not to speed things up, but to slow them down. She was the brake. Her big task was to keep her husband's mental and spiritual energy from overspeeding at the expense of his body, and without her relentless fight to care for him and make him care for himself it is problematical how long he could have survived the strain of the pace fate set, say those who know him well.

"I've been trying to keep him [illegible] for years," Mme. Paderewska explained with a smile. "You see, on the American tours we were always together. But even the strain of them is nothing compared with the strain of these days. Indeed, I positively enjoyed the traveling when we had a private car. That was more comfortable than—than"——

"Staying at home?" I suggested.

"No. That's the one best thing in the world. More comfortable, say, than living in a palace?" she smiled. "These walls are so terribly thick one actually gets tired walking through from one room to another."

The coming of the Paderewskis to Warsaw was dramatically picturesque.

"But not very comfortable," I suggested when she reminisced of that historic journey to Danzig in December.

"Mon Dieu, no!" she grimaced.

"It was a nightmare," explained Mme. Ivanowska, who herself had bade goodby to the Paderewskis and her husband, his aid, when they set sail from England in the little British cruiser Concord in mid-winter, through mine fields, to a new-born Poland seething with internal strife and actively at war with three neighbors.

"That was an omen," Mme. Paderewska interrupted her. "Do you remember the white pigeons which fluttered about? And the name of the ship, Concord? It all meant that my husband would succeed in bringing concord to Poland."

For four years Paderewski had devoted himself in America to preaching Poland's cause and to raising funds for her starving people. Fat contracts and concert engagements went begging. One single tour which would have netted him $125,000 was turned down at the last minute because he needed all his energies for the cause of his fatherland.

No whit behind her husband has been Mme. Paderewska. At the outset of the war she organized the Polish Relief, and all the world remembers the "Mme. Paderewska refugee dolls," turned out from her Paris atelier. Then came the Polish White Cross, put on its feet in America, its first care being the Polish troops in France. Under its banner Polish women everywhere were united and given opportunity to help. Now the White Cross is working in Poland, with more than two hundred separate societies, supplementing the activities of the Polish Red Cross. Through Mme. Paderewska's individual efforts 12,000,000 marks have been raised.

"But most we owe to America," she said. "Our greatest support has been the Polish National Committee in Chicago. The American Poles have been wonderful.

Even Women Soldiers

"And America realizes, I hope," she continued, "Poland is a real republic. From the women's standpoint, for instance, we start our national life with a clean slate, the women having exactly as much weight politically as the men. No anti-suffragists here! There are women members in the Diet and in nearly all the city councils. Why, they're even in the army!"

That last, by the way, is quite true. And the women who wear the uniform of the White Eagle have seen real service, as many a grave testifies.

I remember one morning at the White Cross relief office on Wiejska Street, in Warsaw, where Dr. B. S. Karnienski, an American Pole of

MME. PADEREWSKI AND NURSES TRAINED IN AMERICA

These pictures, the first of their kind to be shown in America, were given by Mme. Paderewska to Mr. Putnam, who left Warsaw just before M. Paderewski resigned as Premier of Poland

A LATE PHOTO OF IGNACE PADEREWSKI TAKEN IN POLAND.

TWO WOUNDED WOMEN SOLDIERS.

Wife of Pianist and Premier Tells of Launching the New Republic

Buffalo, superintends the distribution of clothing sent from the United States among Polish soldiers who are being demobilized because of physical incapacity. Irena was his nineteen-year-old assistant, still in her military hat and coat after a year of service.

In came a couple of boys, one slight and pale, with a new and apparently severe head wound, the other stubby and solid and with a black patch over one eye.

"Sit down!" the doctor called to them cheerily. "I try to make 'em comfortable here," he explained to me with a smile. "They deserve it. Heaven knows, at the front there's little enough consideration for these girls."

Girls! So they were. In their uniforms, with their close-cropped hair and sturdy bearing, I had thought them boys. They were both about seventeen and had been fighting for nearly two years.

Anna, the one with the patch, was just out of hospital, recovering from an abdominal bullet wound. Through an interpreter I ascertained she came from the Ukraine, the unhappy region to the east largely held by the Bolsheviki.

"Why did you go into the army?" I asked.

"My thirteen brothers and my father were fighting. My mother is dead," she answered. "So I cut my hair, borrowed a uniform from my little brother Stephan, and enlisted."

"Where are your brothers now?"

"They are all dead," Anna replied evenly. "Three died fighting. The others were killed by the Bolsheviki. Now I am trying to get well enough to go back and kill them!"

After luncheon at the palace, when I had shaken hands with the host and hostess, according to the pleasant Polish custom, Mme. Paderewska brought in for a moment Jadzia, the eleven-year-old orphan waif she has adopted. Jadzia is a wide-eyed little relic of the days of Poland's greatest tragedies, when the people were swept away like cattle to the east and north by the retreating Russians. Her parents have disappeared long since. She knows nothing of who she is or where she came from. Only she is very happy now because she has all the food she can eat and warm, soft clothes to wear, and Ping, Mme. Paderewska's aristocratic though one-eyed Pekingese, to play with.

There are thousands of other freezing, starving Jadzias, young and old, who might envy Mme. Paderewska's happy wait could they possibly understand that such an unbelievable fairy story actually had come true. Out at Powansky, the refugee station near Warsaw, you may see some of them daily, their miseries and extraordinary wanderings paling into insignificance those of the tribes of Israel. It is said, probably truly, that in remote Siberia there are still lines of expatriated Poles plodding through the snows who know neither that their fatherland is freed or that the war is over!

To a country of such tragedies the Paderewskis went. Behind them in America they left comfort and wealth and acclaim. In abandoning the American concert stage it is fair to estimate that Paderewski renounced at least half a million dollars in the last five years. Also, they turned their backs upon the happiness of their villa in Switzerland.

However one regards it, what a romantic adventure it has been! The Polish pianist, having won fame and wealth in America, returned to the land of his forefathers as its leader in the hour of its regained freedom. For nearly a year the artist has held his own at the councils of the world's leaders and has retained his seat in the saddle of this hardy young stallion of the north, at least until it has become reasonably bridle-wise.

And now the Premier has surrendered the reins. Again, perhaps, he will become pianist. The adventure is ended, the chapter closed—unless another as picturesque suddenly opens; taste for politics and public place, once acquired, is none too readily cast aside. Be that as it may, when the history of remade Europe is written, the largest single measure of credit for the successful establishment of new Poland undoubtedly will be accorded the musician-statesman, Paderewski.